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2017

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**Benefits of Dating Ghost Boyfriend:**

**Writing *Free Spirit***

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**Benefits of Dating Ghost Boyfriend:**

**Writing *Free Spirit***

**By**

**Christina Shea Mayo, B.A.**

**Report**

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## **Dedication**

For my parents, and also for Bruce Springsteen, who is not one of my parents

## **Abstract**

### **Benefits of Dating Ghost Boyfriend:**

#### **Writing *Free Spirit***

Christina Shea Mayo, M.F.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Stuart Kelban

The following report details the creative process behind writing the feature-length screenplay for *Free Spirit*, from the first seed of the story's idea to the full-blown finished script. The report also includes reminiscences on the habits that I've developed or discarded and the influences that I've cultivated and called upon as a writer, during both my time at the University of Texas and before arriving in Austin in August of 2015.

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## Chapter One: Once, Twice, Three Times a Logline

The first screenplay I ever completed as an MFA screenwriter came from an idea that I first came up with in the Fall of 2008, when I was still an eighteen-year-old freshman playwright at Sarah Lawrence College with an academic demeanor that could best be described as “baby rabbit that an old witch made human.” The story the finished screenplay became had long stopped resembling the nebulous idea it was once—but the actual *idea*, the seed of the story, planted in probably October of 2008, was something that gestated for a solid seven years before I actually began writing the screenplay in Cindy McCreery’s Introduction to Screenwriting workshop during my first semester at UT. The eponymous Peach of *Peach* was a character that I thought about so much and so often for *literally seven years* before she made it into Final Draft. As a writer and as an artist, I tend to come up with an idea, and then ponder the idea, forever and ever and ever. Usually.

With the exception of a stroke of genius (WEREGATORS) that struck me last summer, leading into Richard Lewis’s Advanced Screenwriting workshop in my third semester at UT, I tend to hold onto ideas for a while. This leads me to recycle loglines, not because I’m lazy, but because *I have trouble letting go*. The idea for *Free Spirit*, back when it was still untitled, began as one of three loglines that I pitched to Cindy’s workshop back in the second week of my first semester. The idea was still new, and characteristically nebulous, and people weren’t feeling it especially hard. I also hadn’t even remotely planned on writing it when I pitched it, because I knew myself well enough to know that I wasn’t about to write a screenplay about an idea that I literally just came up with because I needed three loglines for the second week of my first semester at UT because I was *not* about to be the only MFA screenwriter who could only come up with two crack ideas. But I liked the logline, even if I didn’t fully understand the logline, and I put it in my back pocket and saved it for later.



The second time I pitched *Free Spirit*, now titled *Free Spirit*, it was the premise of a pilot halfway through Stuart Kelban's Writing for Series Television. Though the idea was more fully (though far, far, far from completely) fleshed out at that point, it was still the least popular among my three loglines with the majority of my workshop, if not necessarily least popular with me. And in fact, that semester—just I had done in Cindy's workshop the prior semester—I went with an idea that I'd had for years. The pilot was actually Introduction to Screenwriting's logline #2, ready to be written, finally and for real this time. And so, the logline for *Free Spirit* returned to the queue, slowly simmering on the backburner.

In my third semester as an MFA screenwriter, I did not *even bother* pitching more than one idea to the Advanced Screenwriting workshop because of the aforementioned summertime stroke of genius (WEREGATORS) and, for the third semester in a row, *Free Spirit* remained on the backburner. But by Winter Break, *Free Spirit* skipped the line to the front of my mind and I was both fairly determined and optimistically convinced that I would write the script during my second Advanced Screenwriting workshop in the Spring. And to be fair, I thought about *Free Spirit* during those winter months *a lot*. For instance, the logline made the leap back to feature idea from pilot (perhaps because I had somewhat arbitrarily determined that I needed to graduate with a second feature under my belt, a decision I've grown to become satisfactorily happy I made).

Pitching *Free Spirit* during our workshop's first meeting in the spring went so disastrously, though, that I nearly changed my mind. People just didn't seem to like the logline, and mercilessly poked holes in the premise, which was certainly constructive and fair, but not exactly good for team *Free Spirit* morale. The logline read as follows:

*When her perfect boyfriend disappears and she's unable to conjure his spirit, a teen clairvoyant must embark on road trip through the underworld in search of answers—with her moody ex-boyfriend as her guide.*

Cool, right? Wrong. Honestly, for whatever reasons, people just didn't seem to care for that logline—not in the Fall of 2015, not in the Spring of 2016, not this past January. A long and tortuous three days passed between Thursday and Sunday, when I began writing the first assignment and when I finally, and for real this time, committed to writing *Free Spirit* after much tedious tossing and turning. Come hell or high water (or both, in my future Act Three!) I was going to write *Free Spirit* before graduating. Later, haters.

## Chapter Two: A Brief Reminiscence on Baby Names

Ever since my time as a blossoming (and bad) high school playwright, I've obsessively pored over babynames.com to find the best names for my characters. Actually, allow me to modify that statement: ever since my days as a wannabe fiction writer in middle school frequently writing first chapters of discarded would-be YA fantasy novels, I've obsessively pored over babynames.com to find the best names for my characters. Never underestimate the amount of time a person who isn't currently having a baby can spend on babynames.com researching names based on their sounds and meanings and through trial and error. Babynames.com is basically one of the first steps in my creative process, and it's a big one.

Titles are never an issue for me, because I kill it with titles. They come to me naturally, perfectly, like glittering cartoon angels descending from heaven on pastel colored clouds. Coming up with the perfect names for your protagonist and everyone she knows, however, can sometimes prove difficult. For me, a character's name is meant to encompass a lot. It needs to be unique, but not too twee. It can be weird, but it can't be annoying (unless that's the point, and even then). It should evoke a certain mood. It should feel a certain way when you think, it should sound a certain way when you say it. It needs to reflect the character. It needs to *fit*, not like a glove, because I don't wear gloves, but like an incredible pair of jeans, because those I do wear, preferably well. The character's name needs to be perfect, totally perfect. *Free Spirit* was no exception.

The hot and awesome protagonist of *Free Spirit* is named Tansy, and Tansy is the perfect name for her. It's interesting, but not unheard of (I worked with a girl named Tansy when I lived in Auckland, New Zealand and she was very fun). It's cute, but not cutesy. It's memorable, but not eye roll-inducing (or at least I hope not). The name Tansy reflects Tansy, and she can be named nothing else.

It is a long and arduous road that ends at Tansy Abner, though. (Her last name is Abner.) The first time I pitched the logline, she didn't have a name, because by the Fall of 2015 I hadn't made it that far. In Stuart's workshop the following spring, she was Sylvie, which is still a good name but which I eventually lost my affinity for. During most of my winter break brainstorming sessions, she was going to be called Otter Owens, because I thought that Otter Owens was an amazing name for a teen witch (she also, eventually, strayed from my conception of her as a teen witch). Otter after God's most perfect animal, the otter, and Owens after Sally and Gillian Owens, the leads of *Practical Magic*, my mom's favorite rom-com and my favorite novel in sixth grade when I went to Alice Hoffman's Barnes & Noble book signing for her new novel (not the same novel) which I read and didn't like, but still had her sign the title page of, and she wrote something about "may your life be filled with magic" because I was a twelve-year-old who was like PRACTICAL MAGIC IS MY FAVORITE NOVEL OF ALL TIME I LOVE YOU. (Thanks, Alice!)

I grew attached to the name Otter Owens, but after excitedly running it by a member of my cohort who told me that it was kind of annoying, I began to see the error in my ways. I began to think of the name Otter Owens as a bad celebrity baby name (which is, to say, a bad name and not necessarily for a bad celebrity baby or baby of a bad celebrity). No protagonist of mine would have a bad celebrity baby name! In with the new year, out with Otter Owens.

In January I was still toying with Sylvie, until my friend from Montreal told me that Sylvie is a name for old French ladies. This friend speaks three languages, so no Sylvie either. Next I wanted to name her Truly, itself an unused name from last semester, when my Advanced Directing partner wouldn't let me name one of the sister wives in a UFO religion cult in our Dogme film Truly. (I eventually berated him into Lonnie and Leela, which the members of the directing class foolishly found confusing.) I felt fairly stoked about the name Truly until the same Canadian friend, a common dream crusher, told me that there was a character named Truly in a show called

*Bunheads* on the now defunct ABC Family that only lasted one season, and so then I was like, never mind! After quickly confirming the sad fact on IMDB, I tossed Truly out the window. This friend assured me that it would be fine because hardly anyone has seen let alone heard of *Bunheads*, but she failed to convince me. So long, Truly. You were fun while you lasted.

This was taking longer than ever before! Usually I'll only seriously consider one or two names, tops, before settling on the perfect name. And when I say seriously consider, I don't mean simply staring at the name's page on babynames.com for longer than is productive. I mean that I envision *a future* with this name. You're going to be spending an inordinate amount of time with your character, so your character can't be named something terrible, or something from a failed ABC Family show about ballerinas. Despite my best efforts, *Free Spirit* didn't have a perfectly named protagonist! And then...the dark clouds parted and the sound of a chorus of angels washed over me, and it came to me.

Tansy. My protagonist would be named Tansy.

### Chapter 3: In Which I Can't Handle the Truth

This screenplay was always supposed to involve the underworld and a road trip. Of course, the underworld is not an actual place (to the extent of my knowledge) and although there are renditions of the underworld in mythology and classic literature, I wasn't interested in Dante. I wanted to do my own version of the underworld in my own unique voice. The dread I felt over deciding to write *Free Spirit* for Stuart's workshop quickly dissipated when I actually began to write the short outline in late January. I liked this idea, after all! There was a reason I never let go, and a good one! I thought my short outline was swell, and I went into the second week of workshop excited to discuss. But I think the first thing Stuart said was literally akin to, "I have to be honest with you. This just isn't working for me at all." This might not be a direct quote, but he definitely said *at all*.

Not, you're off to a good start. But, this just isn't working for me at all. At all. Obviously, *this just isn't working for me at all* (it bears repeating) doesn't instill confidence in an idea that you love. It instills not confidence, but trepidation, and maybe also terror. But hindsight is 20/20, and looking back on my short outline and the way in which I conveyed my ideas, I can see the fundamental flaws.

First, and perhaps foremost, was my problematic desire to write something with the structure of a classic hero's journey. I first studied *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* freshman year of high school, like any good English student, plus I attended Sarah Lawrence College, where Joseph Campbell was practically royalty. I knew how to recognize the milestones, I knew the names of all the tropes, I could rattle off film's most famous examples (none of which are films I really like, mind you). But I myself had never written something with the structure of a hero's journey, not by any stretch of the imagination. I hadn't even ever been especially interested in writing something with a hero's journey, because I didn't and still don't consider it my narrative cup of tea.

When conceptualizing *Free Spirit*, though, I suddenly (and somewhat randomly) had it in my head that it would be fun to write a screenplay with the classic marks of a hero's journey. Fun, and perhaps even rewarding. I soon realized in workshop that this is an artificial set of guidelines to place on your script, especially when it doesn't necessarily lend itself to your story. As a screenwriter, I'll be the first to admit that structure is not my strong suit. Character: yes. World building: yes. Dialogue: double yes (thanks to my days as a *preternaturally gifted* playwright). But Structure: not as much. And it's not even because I'm one of those aspiring screenwriters who turns my nose up at structure—on the contrary! I love a well-structured screenplay with tried and true universally recognized story beats. I more than appreciate structure's inherent value. I can read the writing on the wall! Or rather, on the whiteboard, which outlining *Free Spirit* finally made me break down and start using (more on that later). So, a lack of respect for structure was not the issue. It's more so just that structure doesn't come naturally.

The other major flaw with my conceptualization of *Free Spirit* was this idea of a road trip. Again, in hindsight, I'm not sure why this was so important to me. Road films aren't even a favorite sub-genre of mine, and yet I felt committed to this romanticized notion of writing a road film. (Can you rent a car in the underworld? Apparently, you can.) It was hard for me to let go of these ideas—the hero's journey, the road trip. The mysteries of the heart are subtle and nuanced.

The other major flaw with *Free Spirit*, and a flaw that would take me nearly six months to resolve, was the characterization of the underworld. My idea of it was vague, and yet somehow, I stubbornly clung to it. There were plenty of things that I didn't want the underworld to be, but very few things that I did. Or rather, there *were* things that I did want, but idea after idea, rendition after rendition, variation after variation kept getting overruled (both in my mind and, most acutely painful, on the page). Articulating what I wanted for the underworld was difficult, because I didn't definitively *know* what I wanted.

Finding my own understanding of the underworld would become my greatest struggle with this script. I found it eventually, but the night was dark and full of terrors! In the early phases of my writing process, the professor who would become my thesis advisor kept comparing the underworld in *Free Spirit* to Disney Land. Several times he referenced The Matterhorn, a ride I'm unfamiliar with. During one workshop, he compared *Free Spirit's* underworld to Candy Land instead, perhaps to spice it up.

I couldn't decide which was worse.



## Chapter Four: Variations on an Underworld

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, building the world of the underworld was one of the most difficult parts during this writing process, if not the most difficult. It began as something overly vague and unimpressive, and weirdly enough that's sort of what I wanted. But only at first, and only sort of. The problem was, what I was envisioning in my mind became the equivalent of those "I guess you had to be there!" stories, which is, to say, it was totally clear and cool to me but made little sense to those around me.

There are a few details that never wavered and managed to stick around from draft to draft intact. These details, written into the treatment from week two, remained incredibly important to me and it's hard for me to articulate why. I guess, in a sense, they represented concrete details that crystallized the underworld for me, as I envision it. The details are fairly minor and perhaps don't mean anything—which is, to say, they don't necessarily directly affect or influence the story. But I found these self-invented details evocative nonetheless. For instance, the underworld doesn't seem so different from the real world. There are homes, in towns, there are cars, and bars, and jobs, but instead of people there are spirits. In the underworld, it's dark all the time, though there are a couple towns that try to (embarrassingly) replicate sunlight (this would become just *one* town, which would become an indoor theme park, and would remain a major set piece in every single draft). There's no moon, but the sky is studded with stars. The stars in the underworld can be one of four colors: pale yellow, pale green, lavender, and red.

I thought of the underworld as separated into regions, sort of like counties, similar to the circles in Dante's *Inferno*, only not as dire. And the reasoning behind what kinds of spirits inhabit the underworld, and why, isn't as moralistic as representations in classic literature may have taught us to believe. The underworld isn't necessarily full of sinners who have transgressed, or at least that's not the only way a ghost winds up in the underworld. It's not heaven and it's not hell; it's

different. From draft to draft, that simple distillation remained the same. I always sort of liked the idea that the underworld wasn't particularly remarkable. Though the notion of the underworld as "unremarkable" would evolve a great deal throughout the writing process, it seemed important that the underworld remained, to be perfectly honest, kind of lame. Though the underworld in the final draft is far more fantastical than in the early stages, it's inherently a little bit lame. It did become New Jersey, after all (more on that later).

The underworld had a long, long journey towards becoming upside down, off-kilter New Jersey. Harking back to my somewhat unreasonable determination to write a road film, in the development phase and then in the first draft, I was envisioning the underworld as having a desert terrain for a large majority of the screenplay. The conceptualization of a vast, desert setting came to me without thinking about it much beforehand, and I imagine that's because I associate the desert with road films. I thought, without really thinking, *they're always driving through deserts on road trips, right?* Granted, I myself had never driven through a desert of any kind, and it's rare for me to write about places I've never been to. This isn't a hard and fast rule, but I do often write from life (more on that later), and by the time I drove through the deserts of West Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona en route to Los Angeles, the desert of the underworld was nothing more than a speck in my rearview mirror.

Because I myself had no meaningful connection to driving through deserts, and never *really* did the work in the first draft to fully realize and evoke the desert of the underworld, the setting rang hollow and uninteresting. I was taking for granted that readers would just *know* how roadside desert ghost towns looked and felt, but it was never on the page. No amount of cute town names or mildly interesting one-off characters was going to make the underworld in my first draft a compelling setting for the reader to inhabit for a hundred and twenty pages.

I already knew this heading into the first meeting with my committee, my adviser Stuart Kelban and my reader Cindy McCreery. But if I *did* have any lingering hopes that I could make the desert ghost towns work, my committee quickly put those to rest. We spent a great deal of time during that initial meeting way back in May discussing alternatives. Would the underworld be like Pleasantville? Could it be in black and white? Was the underworld Tansy's high school? Was it the same as her real life, only different? At first I really resisted this idea that the underworld would be a direct reflection of Tansy's real life. I'm not sure why, exactly—narratively it made sense, and gave the reader something to connect back to from her “ordinary world” in Act One. But I wasn't ready to accept the underworld as dark weird New Jersey just yet and so, we kept brainstorming.

This led us to what I'll call the underworld behind Door Number Two. This was the (now also long gone, RIP) setting of the underworld in the second draft. One of the things that my committee and I kept discussing during our first meeting together was giving the underworld a sense of emotional authenticity for the spirits who live there. And I agreed with them—the desert underworld in the first draft was random, arbitrary. There wasn't *really* any reason why it needed to or even should look like that. And what would a desert landscape mean for the spirits inhabiting the underworld?

Stuart and Cindy and I thought, what if the spirits in the underworld—spirits who had committed suicide, or had accidental or violent deaths—experienced in the underworld something they would have enjoyed in real life? What if these spirits sought comfort or solace in the underworld as an oasis of sorts, a tropical and dark paradise? This train of thought led me to Door Number Two, behind which was an underworld-as-Tahiti. Or rather, more vividly in mind, behind Door Number Two was underworld-as-the island-that-the-family-washed-up-on in Swiss Family Robinson (the movie was filmed on the island of Tobago, in case you're wondering). I began re-envisioning the underworld as one big, kitschy island tiki bar.

Basically, I wanted the underworld to look like the Rainforest Café, *and is that so wrong?! The* rain forest version of the underworld was an idea that I really liked, and still do, but it ultimately didn't work. And I think here's why: as I began to write the second draft, I largely maintained all the same story beats and character developments, and simply (or not so simply, to be honest) altered the setting. Unfortunately, I altered the setting without really altering the characters' perspectives, so from the reader's point-of-view, Tansy still spent most of the script in this new variation on the underworld as a tourist. In hindsight this makes sense, because that variation on the underworld was literally like being at a vacation resort.

My adviser and I kept in touch as I wrote the underworld's major overhaul in the second draft, but for the most part I kept plowing straight ahead because I liked this idea of one big, kitschy island tiki bar so much (I just really like the Rainforest Café, *okay?!). When Stuart and I finally met to discuss in person during our next big meeting of the summer, I was met with some harsh news. It just didn't work for him. Again. Immediately I had trauma flashbacks of that second week in workshop, when I had been riding high on my cute genius ideas only to come plummeting back down to earth when faced with the inescapable realities of a fundamentally flawed story.*

I couldn't afford to wallow in despair for too long, nor could I afford to fill my pockets with rocks and walk into the sea, so I quickly went back to the drawing board. As it turns out, I didn't *really* have to start from square one, because I finally began to see ideas that I had previously discussed with Stuart (and disliked) with a fresh pair of eyes. I wrote *a lot* of pages that will never see the light of day because I wasn't doing the necessary work to keep everything close to Tansy's perspective. The reader's journey had to be Tansy's journey, and for that to truly work on an engaging level, Tansy would have to be more present and active in the underworld. She would need to be intensely focused. Tansy was on a mission. Her eyes had to stay on the prize. She couldn't be a visitor in her own story, meaning she couldn't keep getting distracted by

inconsequential, ineffectual, dumb stuff. She couldn't be a tourist in Disney World (again with the Disney World).

Additionally, Stuart and I circled back to the idea that the underworld should look like something we saw in Act One and finally, I agreed with him. This is what led me to the underworld that lies behind Door Number Three. Behind Door Number Three is Manahawkin, or something like Manahawkin, only not. I had been worried that the story would get mired down in a small town that I didn't necessarily feel was ripe with fantastical narrative possibilities. However, Stuart assured me that this was *my* underworld and I could make up whatever rules I wanted, just so long as I remained consistent within my own established set of guidelines. We agreed that the underworld stayed weird: you could go through a door and wind up on the other side of a window. Enter one place and exit through another. In that sense, the underworld-as-New Jersey *was* ripe with fantastical narrative possibilities. Oh, the places you'll go. The dead people you'll see.

This is, by far, the best variation on an underworld, and it shows in the final draft. The idiosyncrasy comes from character, and not from scenery. There's an emotional connection to the setting, and we can finally see the underworld *through* the story. The focus is on Tansy's search and who, what, where it leads her to. The world is more fully evoked, the settings manage to be original and weird while remaining recognizable at their heart.

Besides, my mother refused to take me to Rainforest Café at Sawgrass Mills Mall for "research" when I went home to Florida for Memorial Day weekend, so I blame a lot of the problems in the second draft on her.

## Chapter Five: Variations on a Shea Mayo

It seemed to me that there was a generally held belief in my cohort that all of my protagonists were based on me, and that they were doing things in the story that I myself had probably done in real life. This on its own is not necessarily the worst thing, because my protagonists are awesome, but it's troubling when filtered through some of workshop's greatest hits, like effortlessly referring to my protagonist as a "slutty gold digger" or "shallow sex-crazed bitch" or, my personal favorite, "for someone who doesn't live much of a life and never really has, she thinks very highly of herself which is funny at first but then becomes obnoxious." Zing!

To be fair, a lot of my female leads do *sound* a lot like me, because I have a very distinctive voice, both in the way that I speak and the way that I write. My protagonists are always young women, because that's deeply important to me. And all writers probably write from life to a certain extent. And to a certain extent, I'm flattered that people in my cohort think I'm so interesting! But no, not all my protagonists are a variation on the theme "Shea Mayo" and most of the things that they do and are doing in any given script, I am capable of making up. Every writer (well, maybe not *every writer*) has to sift through insensitive notes. A lot of being in a graduate workshop, and a lot of being a screenwriter—in fact, a lot of being alive in the world—is an ability to remind yourself that sometimes even when something feels mean, it isn't. But even if I continue to cultivate this ability, one of the potential pitfalls of having a distinct voice is that the emphasis sometimes becomes how my stories *sound*, instead of on a meaningful exploration of their ideas. If people find it difficult to understand how *your* character fits into *their* perception of the world, it can feel like you're left with a script that's all dressed up with nowhere to go.

I think another negative ramification of people assuming that your characters are directly akin to *you*, instead of what they actually are—a character—is this reluctance to examine your material beyond face value. I've frequently heard in workshop that I need to do something to create

sympathy or relatability for my protagonists. This isn't a note I always agree with, because it assumes that there *aren't* people who feel sympathy for or relatability to a possibly abrasive young woman. But in writing *Free Spirit*, I knew from day one that I wanted Tansy to be a hero that young people could look up to and adults would still find authentic. Beneath her cutesy veneer needed to be true heartache and longing. And I wanted there to be no mistaking that *Free Spirit* dealt with darker, more mature, and, ultimately, worthwhile themes. (It's oftentimes alarming to be confronted with what people do or do not deem thematically worthwhile in a story.)

*Free Spirit* is the third feature length screenplay that I've completed, and as far as my protagonists go, Tansy is probably the furthest from me. She's younger, she grew up differently, her familial relationships (and ghost dating experiences) do not reflect my own. But I understood her, and I grew to understand her and *love* her more and more with each passing draft. I would like to think that when the people who know me well read *Free Spirit*, they recognize Tansy as a dazzling new invention, a special creation all her own.

The first (and worst) of my completed features is an unironically and unequivocally *Save the Cat!* structured rom-com sex romp where, nevertheless, the true love story is between the two female best friends at its center. Lottie, the script's protagonist, was probably the closest a character's ever been to me as I've been going through the process of writing her—I began writing my first feature, entitled *Dirty Little Birds*, at twenty-one years old and the lead is a direct reflection of me at the time. The *story*, however, is entirely made up.

The next feature I wrote, during my first year in the MFA screenwriting program, frequently got a lot of flak in workshop—primarily because of its central character. *Peach* featured another young female lead, another character that people found both off-putting and eerily similar to me (thanks, guys!). *Peach* is a script that I'm incredibly proud of, not only because of the characters, but also because of the world that those characters inhabit. This was the first piece of

writing (in my screenwriting and even playwriting) where a strong sense of place factored heavily into, and also more directly shaped, the narrative. The world was fully-realized and odd, the details specific. But the plot of *Peach*, while woven with heavy influences of magical realism, was fairly low-key. The plot wasn't intricately plotted.

I would go on to write *another* script that took place in South Florida in the Fall of 2016, with another female protagonist that people found both hard to like and like me (thanks again, guys!). This script was a pilot (and is amazing) but in many ways, it helped give me the confidence I need to tackle a project like *Free Spirit*. The hour-long pilot, entitled *Hot Scary Summer*, represented my first major foray into genre. Though I've always been a huge and knowledgeable fan (confusingly, to some) of horror and, to lesser extent, sci-fi, I never really thought that I myself was capable of happily writing such a script. But successfully completing *Hot Scary Summer* imbued me with the confidence boost I needed to take on a story on *Free Spirit's* level. This would be my first foray into fantasy. Magical realism has been a mainstay in my writing for a while now, but I wouldn't classify any of those scripts (or pieces of prose) as fantasies. They aren't true representations of the genre, whereas *Free Spirit* is fantasy all day long.

Plot has never been my strong suit, though. Maybe (hopefully!) one day this will change, but constructing the Swiss clock of a plot that *Free Spirit* required would take more time and effort than anything I'd ever written before. Being bad at plot would quickly come back to haunt me.



## Chapter Six: A Brief Reminiscence on Bruce Springsteen

Allow me, if you will, to digress for just a moment.

Bruce Springsteen is a major part of my creative process, and has been since high school. He would have probably been from infancy, had I been making meaningful art as an infant. My father considers himself one of The Boss's biggest fans (all of his middle-aged fans from New Jersey consider themselves The Boss's biggest fan) and he brainwashed me from an early, early age to feel love and adoration for the music of Bruce Springsteen. I hesitate to even call it brainwashing (it was) because I genuinely do love his music, and not only his music but his *words*.

When first composing a treatment for *Free Spirit*, I decided early on that Tansy would live in New Jersey. The last two scripts I'd written took place in South Florida, and though I liked the idea of following this recent trend, I decided pretty quickly that my home state wasn't quite right for the story. New Jersey was better. (How often is that sentence ever included in a master's report?) Perhaps it was partly a loving nod to my father and his childhood, but mostly it was because New Jersey sucks and Tansy needed to feel like her ordinary world sucked out loud. Also, I've spent a considerable amount of time in New Jersey (yearly summer stays on Long Beach Island, Thanksgivings in Delran or Milford or Manahawkin) and I like writing about places that I've actually been to, even if it's not a place that I actually liked. I find the personal connection helpful when writing, plus it helps me picture where a scene is taking place, physically, more vividly in my mind.

Naming my favorite Bruce Springsteen album is tricky because I legitimately like all of them (all of them). Even the rare Springsteen album that is critically mixed or, dare I say, maligned is still thoroughly enjoyed by Shea Mayo. There's at least *one* good song on every album, and usually much more. We can agree to disagree, but I would be right and you would be wrong. Every album is a great album. Decide for yourself, but decide correctly.

One of Springsteen's less popular albums is probably 1987's *Tunnel of Love*. Recorded in the aftermath of Springsteen's divorce to his first wife and after he decided to part ways with The E Street Band (and released the same year, in fact, as my parent's own ill-fated marriage), *Tunnel of Love* is an album about the ways in which love can go wrong, about how difficult or even impossible it is to ever really know someone. The album went triple Platinum upon release, but *Tunnel of Love* is one of Springsteen's least performed sets of songs. People seldom mention songs like "Tougher Than the Rest" in the same breath as songs like "Born to Run," and *Tunnel of Love* has a few of what my father, Springsteen's very own self-proclaimed #1 fan, sometimes refers to as "stinkers." (On an unrelated side note, my father thought that Springsteen alternated between singing "brilliant disguise" and "bird in the sky" on the track "Brilliant Disguise." Springsteen did not.)

I love this album. *Tunnel of Love* and *I can ride down, baby, into this tunnel of love*. The eponymous "Tunnel of Love" definitely isn't one of my favorite songs, but *Tunnel of Love* does have one of my favorite songs—the far lesser known "When You're Alone." The song is about the deterioration of a relationship from the perspective of a man named Johnny, and also about, you might have guessed, what it's like when you're alone. So, if you're wondering where Johnny got his name from, wonder no longer. Tansy and Lowell might have taken some time to settle on but I never looked any further than Johnny for the name of Tansy's inciting incident of a ghost boyfriend.

Bruce Springsteen wasn't a part of the outline phase. He was never once mentioned in the treatment, nor in the initial beat outlines. It's not like I knew from the beginning that Bruce Springsteen would play a significant part in Tansy's life and therefore, to a larger extent, the story. It wasn't until I began to write the first scene, wherein Tansy fails to summon her parents in the graveyard (St. Mary's, an actual cemetery in Manahawkin), that Bruce Springsteen found his way into Final Draft and *Free Spirit*. She recites lyrics from "Dancing in the Dark" like a solemn prayer,

performing embarrassing dance moves made famous by a young Courtney Cox in the music video with all the sacred fervor of a Eucharistic minister.

The ideas kept on coming from there. I didn't plan any of these moments, I never thought, "I've gone fifteen pages without mentioning a Springsteen song and the situation must be rectified." Every time Tansy murmurs a lyric like an invocation, she does so because I just thought of it then and there. Atlantic City, for example (both the song and the city), was never a part of the first draft and still not a part of the second. But in the final meeting between me and my adviser before I moved to Los Angeles, we worked hard to devise a plan of attack for the final showdown in Act Three. We both considered aloud, "what's the actual worst?" Casinos in Atlantic City. More terribly specifically, now mercifully defunct casinos in Atlantic City formerly owned by *you know who*. Once in Atlantic City, it seemed only natural that Tansy drop a lyric from one of Springsteen's saddest, songs, ever. And with that, hell was revealed.

As an adolescent, I remember watching home videos of myself as a fat infant (so fat). In one such video, I'm looking fat and like a baby per usual, and my father is watching the music video for "Dancing in the Dark" with me on the TV in our heavily carpeted living room as my mother laughs from behind the lens. He's moving me around like a marionette, maneuvering my blubbery arms back and forth, and he turns and smiles at the camera and says, "Look! She's dancing in the dark." First I stare at the camera blankly like a small blinking cow, but soon I smile too (because I had a very pleasant disposition as a baby) and my preternatural acknowledgement of "Dancing in the Dark" makes my father smile even more. The home video runs for the duration of the music video as my father continues to sway me back and forth like a person who is on drugs. I don't know if I did, in fact, feel like I was dancing in the dark in that moment, because I was an infant and can no longer access those memories. But I *would* like to think that this is the moment where the seed was first planted. The moment that led to my endless affection for Bruce Springsteen, to his role in

my own creative process as an artist, even all these years later, even after my experiences and environment have taken things away from me that I'll never get back. There are certain things that I can rely upon while writing, and one of those things is that listening to Bruce Springsteen can only ever help. Who can argue with that?

Also, the album cover for *Tunnel of Love* features Bruce Springsteen leaning against a cream-colored Cadillac Coupe De Ville wearing a black suit and bolo tie. I want to get lost in that photograph of Bruce Springsteen in a bolo tie. Don't you?

## Chapter Seven: Outlining is Such Sweet Sorrow

Outlining may one day kill me. In *The New Yorker* article they'll publish in the days following my death, no doubt a tribute written by a friend and fellow luminary, they'll say, "She died doing what she loved the most: writing. Though technically she died of outlining." Cause of death: outlining. "She lived a rich and fulfilling life, she pioneered the Screenplay category of the Pulitzer, but outlining was always bound to catch up with her one day. And so it goes."

Outlining is an undeniably and unequivocally important part of screenwriting. As a student of playwriting, however, I never used to outline. I wasn't even encouraged to. Insane as it sounds to me now, I just wrote, and I figured things out along the way. A play would begin as one thing and finish as another. Not in the sense that the story would organically evolve, but in the sense that I literally figured out the story as I went along. That was just my creative process as a playwright.

I don't doubt that there are playwrights who outline before writing. I also don't doubt that there are workshops that teach playwriting students to outline first, write later—but it simply wasn't taught in my playwriting workshops at Sarah Lawrence College, where I earned my Bachelor's degree. I reigned for four years as playwriting princess without ever outlining a single word beforehand. The downside of this, of course, is that you write a lot of pages that you don't ever use. As a playwright, I wrote *actual hundreds* of pages that never made it into the final draft. I wouldn't necessarily say that I wasted my time, because those pages always taught me something important about the story. But I did *spend* a lot of time writing pages for moments that ultimately didn't go anywhere, devoting time to characters that didn't make the final cut.

Another stark and obvious difference between playwriting and screenwriting is stage directions versus screen directions. My stage directions were deliberately detailed and lyrical in scale; this simply isn't possible in a screen direction, where you can't get bogged down in descriptions. The characters in my plays had a dozen pages worth of uninterrupted conversations

at a time; this is generally frowned upon in screenwriting. The length of a play can also vary wildly, and that's mostly okay. Back when I thought I was good-looking young people's answer to Tony Kushner, I wrote a play that was three acts and a staggering one hundred and seventy-six pages long. Three acts were eventually condensed into two, but when the play was performed in the spring of my senior year, it ran for over two hours with a ten-minute intermission. These days, I *shudder* at the thought of writing a script for a film that lasts over two hours.

When my mentor at Sarah Lawrence, himself a respected playwright, learned of my desire to make the transition into screenwriting at the onset of my senior year, he told me that he worried I would struggle with the change because I possess "a real love of language." He was right. I did struggle, and still do. I haven't lost that love of language, but it's often something that I have to soften in my screenwriting rather than bolster. Not everyone wants a screenplay that reads like compelling prose. Not everyone *doesn't* want that either, but there are bigger fish to fry when finishing a feature, so to speak.

This is why I struggle with outlining. It's not only because I learned its value late in my academic career, but also because, until very recently, I would *obsess* over the prose. I would spend time laboriously editing and revising my outlines as if I was writing a novella, and this is neither conducive to finishing an outline nor an effective use of your time as an MFA screenwriting student. It would take me *so long* to write a carefully constructed paragraph of prose that six or seven pages in, the thought of actually hammering out the necessary story beats seemed unimaginable. With a plot full of as many twists and turns as *Free Spirit*, I had to let go of this habit very quickly. I simply wasn't getting anywhere outlining the script in a way that was typical of my writing process, or at least I wasn't getting very far.

In writing *Free Spirit* and learning to both streamline and enrich the outlining phase of my writing process, I experienced several breakthroughs. First and foremost: the beauty of dry erase

boards. It's not that I never heard professors preach the beauty of the dry erase board; it's just that I ignored them. Even my first (and a wonderful) screenwriting professor at Sarah Lawrence insisted that we use note cards to beat out our scripts, which I politely secretly declined. And I honestly don't think it's because I'm lazy! I honestly think it's because I don't like writing things by hand. But in a one-on-one meeting with Stuart early in the spring semester, I finally saw the light that shone down on the dry erase board like a spotlight straight from heaven. I *saw* the plot points, I could visually chart the shifts in the story. One thing led to another, everything was cause and effect, and I was able to fill in the blanks. I then spent the remainder of the semester with not one but two whiteboards in my one-bedroom apartment, and they became an integral part of writing *Free Spirit*. I'll never write another script without them.

Second major breakthrough: the beauty of bullet points. Believe it or not, *Free Spirit* was the first time I'd ever written a bulleted act breakdown. In the past, I'd always outlined an entire script in prose format, page upon page of jaunty paragraphs. But as I mentioned, this was exhausting. Though another opportunity to exercise my voice, writing detailed prosaic outlines adopting the tone of my protagonists was not the true point of an outline. The point of an outline is to work out the kinks in your story, and as soon as I stopped outlining in full sentences, the outlining process improved immeasurably. I swiftly set up my own system of breaking down the plot using staggered bullet points, and this method of outlining was positively speedy compared to everything I'd been doing in previous semesters. It was liberating!

Of course, invariably, the final draft strayed from my outline. I made important changes regarding the supporting characters and I altered settings substantially (the inclusion of Nate, the underworld behind Door Number Three). But I was able to get where I needed to go because I had already done the bulk of the work. I recognized which hurdles I would need to jump when writing the script because I had encountered them in the outline. I knew which beats would be

absolutely essential to include because I stared them down in the outline. The outline's just another stop along the road that ends in a finished screenplay. But it's a stop that must be made. It's a connecting flight you can't miss.



## **Chapter Eight: You Can't Start a Fire Without a Spark**

In a clear-eyed and fundamental way, *Free Spirit* has been the hardest thing I've ever had to write. It's also been one of the most rewarding. In moving to Austin, in attending the University of Texas, in sitting in mostly windowless rooms with members of my workshops, I stepped out of my comfort zone. I didn't always get along with everyone, but I never stopped pushing myself to grow as a writer and I never stopped striving to give and get good feedback. But endeavoring to write *Free Spirit* was the first time I stepped out of my comfort zone in my actual writing. I've never written anything like *Free Spirit* before. Maybe I'll never write anything quite like it again. The comfort, now, is in knowing that I can.

The spring semester was a uniquely difficult one. For instance, I shaped *Free Spirit* without as many voices as is typical in a workshop environment. I wrote the first draft in a smaller, more individualized and independent workshop setting, which was beneficial in some ways and detrimental in others. I was also taking a core graduate poetry workshop simultaneously. The workshop was wonderful, the poets warm and delightful. I genuinely enjoy reading and writing poetry, but the helpful links to screenwriting are few and far between. If nothing else, writing poetry provides me with more opportunities to sharpen an already easily discernible voice. But when I write poetry, I examine my writing on a sentence level, carefully considering not the story, but how the words look and sound on the page. Poetry is writing on a micro level. If you were to delicately contemplate every sentence in your screenplay on a micro level, then you would probably miss a couple birthdays between page one and page one hundred and twenty.

I loved my poetry workshop, but it hindered the writing process for *Free Spirit* sometimes. I altered my perspective as a writer and reader in the spring semester, which slowed down my writing process. It took me much longer to finish *Free Spirit* than I had initially anticipated. It's not that writing a feature length script should ever be easy or effortless, but things can still take longer than

expected. I would like to think, though, that this was the writing process where I learned the most about my *own* process as a screenwriter so far. I developed new and important habits while letting go of old ones that weren't useful to me anymore. And in the midst of all that discovery and dissolution, I still managed to keep the parts of my own creative process that have always been a part of me, things that were there long before I even recognized them in myself. *Free Spirit* is a great script, and it will only get better. I'm leaving this program with a script (a few scripts, actually!) that I'm exceedingly and unaccountably proud of. It took a long time to get to where I am now, and I still have a long, long way to go.

But as Tansy and The Boss would say, "You can't start a fire without a spark."

## **FREE SPIRIT**

*There are some really good reasons to talk to dead people, and one of them is love. I exclusively date ghosts, but we're not always exclusive, and this is usually after we have a conversation about exclusivity. I'm not trying to brag, but usually they're exclusive with me. Maybe they fool around with other ghosts, but I highly doubt they're seeing other alive girls, and I definitely don't think other alive girls are seeing them. I've never met another girl who can see and speak to ghosts. It helps that nobody living really cares about anyone but themselves anyway. Most alive people's most important relationship is with themselves, even if they are also technically in a relationship with another person. So I think I'm doing pretty good by having meaningful relationships with ghosts, even though they're dead. I used to call them phantoms, my phantom lovers, because I think both the words "phantom" and "lover" are funny. But then I started to feel like the word phantom implies that my boyfriends aren't really real, which isn't true. They're really real to me. Boys who committed suicide are my favorite, and they usually make great boyfriends. Not just because they're sensitive, but because a lot of the time they want to be dead, unless they totally regret it, which is a whole nother banana. I also feel a special kinship to suicide spirits, because both my parents killed themselves, so I guess it's in my genes. I'm not necessarily saying I'm going to kill myself one day, but I'm also not not saying that. Murder victims are my second favorite, and depending on how they died, they usually make pretty decent boyfriends. Violent accidental deaths are good too, car accidents or elevator accidents, shipwrecks or plane crashes, followed by boys who drowned or died in a fire. My least favorite is spirits who died of disease, like from natural causes. Not that I have anything against sick people, and usually I feel pretty bad for them. I just don't feel like they make exciting boyfriends. Recent additions to the spirit world can be tricky because they usually aren't well adjusted. Boys who died hundreds of years ago can be fun for a bit, like if I'm feeling experimental, but eventually the distance between us becomes an issue. I'm open to dating a girl ghost, I just haven't met one who I'm physically attracted to yet. An absence of outward signs of trauma is of course ideal, but super chill ghosts aren't always easy to come by.*

## Act One

Sixteen- year-old Tansy is a clairvoyant who exclusively dates ghosts, because she thinks that ghosts know the most about being in love. She lives in present-day New Jersey with her grandfather, the only living person with whom she's close. But Tansy's grandfather is getting older, his health is ailing and his behavior is becoming erratic. Tansy's parents both killed themselves when she was an infant, first her mother (who suffered from postpartum depression) and then her father soon after. She's been seeing ghosts since she was old enough to remember, and dating them since she hit puberty. Her current and favorite boyfriend is a spirit that Tansy calls Johnny Appleseed, which isn't his real last name, but he can't remember his real last name. Johnny is a wholesome and handsome ghost who was murdered in the 1950s and he's amazing boyfriend material. One day, Johnny fails to appear to Tansy and she's unable to summon his spirit. Even worse, she soon realizes that she's unable to summon any spirits—she can no longer see or hear ghosts—and she's left heartbroken and reeling. She has a dream where she talks to the moon, and the moon tells her that an evil specter has been collecting spirits in the underworld and he won't let them leave, and this has begun to have an adverse effect on Tansy's clairvoyance. She's losing her ability to commune with the dead. If she wants to set Johnny's spirit free, then she'll have to enter the underworld to find him. Otherwise, the spirit world will be lost to her forever. When Tansy wakes up, she tries her hardest to summon a spirit—any spirit—to lead her into the underworld. Much to her dismay, she conjures her ex-boyfriend Lowell, an off-kilter manic depressive who committed suicide in the early 90s and hasn't moved on in more ways than one. Because Tansy is a living being, she can't navigate the underworld without a guide. Lowell reluctantly agrees to help her, and Tansy prepares to cross the threshold into the underworld.

## Act Two

Tansy takes the night bus to Long Beach Island, where she meets Lowell on Barnegat Lighthouse Beach. You can pass through the entrance to the underworld by walking up the stairs of the lighthouse, but it's *a lot* more stairs than are actually in the lighthouse? So it's like, hard. When Tansy and Lowell finally reach the top of the lighthouse, they emerge back down on the beach below—which is the same, only different. They board the ferry that takes them to the underworld. After the boat ride, Tansy and Lowell enter the underworld through the gates. The underworld is not entirely different from the world of the living. There are homes, in towns, there are cars, and bars, and jobs, but instead of people there are spirits. The underworld is inhabited by spirits who haven't moved on, and for a multitude of reasons. Tansy and Lowell begin their road trip through the underworld, following clues and meeting other spirits along the way. They soon realize that Johnny isn't the only spirit who's gone missing—it seems like every ghost has a friend, or a friend of a friend, who's disappeared. Tansy and Lowell repeatedly hear mention of an entity called Collector Specter, and of a mysterious place called Glowworm Grotto, where spirits become trapped once taken. There are “tests” that Tansy and Lowell must pass, and obstacles that they must overcome, in order to reach Glowworm Grotto, which is supposedly in Small Mountain, on the other side of the Midnight Blue Forest (the most “underworldly” part of the underworld). Most of the chill spirits—which is, to say, not the freaks—live in the populated neighborhoods and towns. Ghosts who live in isolation, out in phantasmal nature, are more unpredictable and possibly dangerous. The further into the outskirts of the underworld Tansy and Lowell go, the spookier the terrain becomes. The final spirit that Tansy and Lowell meet before entering the Midnight Blue Forest is Tansy's grandmother Orla, who died decades before Tansy was born. Tansy explains to Grandma Orla why she's in the underworld, and Grandma Orla tells Tansy that her parents also disappeared, possibly years ago (the concept of time in the underworld is fuzzy and elastic). Tansy

is stunned. She has never seen, or heard from, the ghosts of her parents. She has never been able to conjure their spirits, and she now wonders if this is why. Tansy and Lowell press on towards Glowworm Grotto.

### Act Three

Light is unwelcome in the Midnight Blue Forest, plus it's way cold, and Tansy and Lowell find it predictably difficult to traverse. They meet the spirit of an old woman in the forest, whom they initially find to be terrifying, but they soon realize that she's not half as frightening as she looks, and is actually pretty good intentioned. She gives them the final clue that they need in order to reach Small Mountain, and presumably Glowworm Grotto. When Tansy and Lowell finally emerge from the tree line, they reach a cave at the foot of Small Mountain. Lowell is scared to descend—nobody knows what's *under* the underworld, and Lowell doesn't particularly care to find out. Tansy goes on alone, and descends through darkness. She fears she is stuck, trapped in the pitch black and she can't go on, until Lowell appears to light her way and they reach Glowworm Grotto together. The cavern is kind of marvelous and totally amazing looking, and Tansy is finally reunited with Johnny. But he warns her about Collector Specter, about how he's dangerous, and if Tansy dies down here...he doesn't know where her spirit will go. Tansy confronts Collector Specter, summoning her inner strength and self-confidence, in order to banish his spirit under the underworld and set all the trapped spirits free. When Tansy defeats Collector Specter, Glowworm Grotto bursts into light. It is revealed that all the glowworms that spangle the cave walls are actually trapped spirits that have shrunk and stagnated over thousands of years of confinement. Tansy and the countless freed spirits ascend to the top of Small Mountain, which is home to a small town of angels. The angels point many of the ghosts in the right direction, towards wherever they need

to go in order to finally move on—but not before they throw a super fun party. Tansy meets her parents, and they embrace. She must choose between staying in the underworld, with Johnny and Lowell and her mom and dad, or returning to the world of the living. Tansy realizes that she hasn't lived the fullness of her life yet, her soul isn't finished yet, and she leaves the underworld with the self-assurance to live fully and the knowledge that to live the life you want, you must first believe in yourself. She returns to her “ordinary world” in New Jersey, and though she still has her clairvoyant capabilities, she finally braves the new frontier of making meaningful connections with human beings, who still breath.

#### Thoughts Questions Concerns

Okay. Bear with me. I know that one of my biggest challenges will be navigating a banana ass plot, in the vein of *The Wizard of Oz* or *Escape to Witch Mountain* or *Ponyo*, coupled with an atypical tone. The story is, essentially, a coming of age fantasy with a plot akin to a fairy tale, but it's not necessarily intended for children or for an especially young audience. It's not adults-only fare either, though, so I think it will be challenging for me to walk this line in a way that feels tonally consistent. I want to avoid mercurial shifts in tone. And while not a broad comedy, I want the story to feel humorous while dealing with dark and sensitive subject matter. *Free Spirit* is also a fanciful road trip film. I know that road movies are not only about the destination, but also about who you meet along the way, and where you meet them, and how, and why. In building my own interpretation of the underworld, I want to mine true- to-life emotions from a fantastical set of circumstances. Even though they're in the underworld, it is important to me that Tansy and Lowell and the other characters in the film have logical emotional responses. I think the most tenuous part of my plot, right now, is the character of Collector Specter (if you're going to laugh at me, do it

*behind my back!*) and his motivations/role as Tansy's primary adversarial foe. I don't want Tansy's goal to feel nebulous, and I want to make sure that there's a concrete desire she's working towards, and one that matters—like the ghosts saving their home in *Beetlejuice*. The theme is largely about Tansy's internal growth, and the various spirits and incidents that she encounters on her journey, the trials she faces, affect her and change her as she goes. I don't want the plot to feel overly episodic, but I do like the idea that the various stages of Tansy's quest could be chapters in a book. I will also work on bolstering the rules of the underworld and the details of Tansy's clairvoyance. The underworld will be separated into regions that Tansy and Lowell will have to pass through en route to Small Mountain, similar to the circles in Dante's *Inferno*, only not as dire. And the reasoning behind what kinds of spirits inhabit the underworld, and why, isn't as moralistic. The underworld isn't necessarily full of sinners who have transgressed, or at least that's not the only way a ghost winds up in the underworld. Throughout their journey, Tansy and Lowell will travel through the various neighborhoods of the underworld, and the ghosts that inhabit each region are largely determined by what sort of spirit they are. Sometimes spirits gravitate towards a specific neighborhood because they died in a similar fashion. Other spirits create neighborhoods that strive to emulate the eras during which they lived. None of the spirits in the underworld know what lies beyond the borders of the underworld, and the existence of angels is sort of a fabled notion. God is never mentioned directly, and neither is the devil, though there is the concept of a "city in the sky" and an...under the underworld. The spirits that Tansy and Lowell meet can be other ghosts that he knows (through his afterlife in the underworld) or ghosts that she knows (and has perhaps dated, or used to visit with as a child). There can also be spirits they meet along the road for the very first time. Though there is not an increase in wickedness as Tansy and Lowell move through the underworld, as in Dante's nine concentric circles of Hell, the terrain does become darker and



less predictable. The underworld is not thought to have a knowable center, as it stretches out in all directions. In the underworld it's dark all the time, though there are a couple towns that try to replicate sunlight. There's no moon, but the sky is studded with stars. The stars in the underworld can be one of four colors: pale yellow, pale green, lavender, and red.

A living being cannot traverse the underworld without a spirit guide. Tansy's not quite sure if ghosts in the underworld can hurt her, but she feels like they probably could, if they wanted. If Tansy dies in the underworld, she's not sure what will happen to her soul.

## Filmography for FREE SPIRITS

- The Wizard of Oz
  - One of the best weirdest most bizarre most indelible movies ever made for children, objectively. The Wizard of Oz is also pretty haunting and like, probably really for adults. In some ways, Tansy's quest (and personal growth) closely mirrors Dorothy's.
- Wristcutters: A Love Story
  - An adaptation of Etgar Keret's novella *Kneller's Happy Campers*, which is a huge inspiration for me. The rendition of the afterlife in Wristcutters is much more mundane and naturalistic than I'm envisioning for Free Spirits, but it also depicts a winsome road trip and has elements of both a buddy film and a love story.
- Seeking a Friend for the End of the World
  - I really enjoy this film and the uniqueness of its premise, but I feel like it makes an unfortunate tonal shift halfway through the story, which is something that I definitely want to avoid. I think the first half is a lot stronger than the second, and I don't really care for the ending (though there are honestly only so many ways this movie could have ended).
- Ponyo
  - Poetic and magical and unfolds fucking fantastically. This film mixes fantasy and folklore in a way that I admire endlessly, and its story echoes Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, another enduring source of inspiration for me. Hayao Miyazaki is bae, and his narratives remind me of no one else's stories but his own. I hope to follow in the footsteps of his affinity for fantastical images, plus Ponyo is a bad bitch baby who doesn't give up on anything. If you don't like this movie then get the fuck out because you are not a team player.
- Spirited Away
  - Another fanciful plot in an otherworldly world, and another wonderfully weird young female protagonist with a similar personal trajectory to Tansy's. I will follow Hayao Miyazaki into the dark!
- Beetlejuice
  - Upon rewatching, this film doesn't actually have that much in common with mine from a plot standpoint, and isn't really how I'm planning to depict the afterlife or the underworld. While the tone is similarly dark and off-kilter, I think that the comedy is a little broader and it relies heavily upon visual humor. And while Lydia is great, I don't think she's super similar to my conception of Tansy—she's also not the protagonist of the film. Visually imaginative but I never cared a ton about the characters.
- Escape to Witch Mountain
  - Not much in common other than a bonkers fantasy-adventure plot, a journey with a specific destination, and young leads with paranormal abilities and without parents. Truly I was just tickled when I suddenly remembered that this movie existed, and pored over its Wikipedia page.

- A Life Less Ordinary
  - Danny Boyle is also bae, but I have mixed feelings about this film. The tone is curious but confusing and the plot is pretty messy. The inclusion of angels—while not entirely uninteresting—feels perfunctory and the depiction of the afterlife is really silly. Not a terrible movie, just not terribly satisfying. Also I will never stop laughing about Ewan McGregor’s haircut.
- About Schmidt
  - Perhaps the least in common on the surface, but a character-driven comedy with tragic undercurrents and a protagonist who embarks on an unpredictable journey with a singular destination in mind. A series of events unfolds, and the main character discovers unexpected things about himself and his life. An enviable tone of humorous melancholy.
- Stardust
  - A pretty charming and whimsical adult fairy tale about heroism and romance that’s also kind of funny. Stardust is more of a straightforward fairy tale/period piece, though, and probably more elaborately plotted.

## **FREE SPIRIT Short Outline**

### Act One

To sixteen-year-old Tansy Abner, the paranormal isn't. She exclusively dates ghosts, because she thinks that ghosts know the most about being in love. The benefits to having a ghost boyfriend are many: they will never die, because they are already dead. This also means, they probably won't change much. They are who they are when you meet them—there is no glum realization, no palpable disappointment when they turn into someone you don't recognize. They probably won't break up with you, which means you always get to be the dumper and never the dumpee. Girls probably won't steal your ghost boyfriend because girls can't see your ghost boyfriend. Tansy dated an alive boy once, just for a bit of variety, but then her friend Candace stole her boyfriend and it made her so angry that she wanted to kill her, but then the thought of Candace cavorting with one of her ex-boyfriends in the underworld made her so angry that she actually didn't want to kill her, so as to avoid this possibility. From that point forward Tansy decided to satiate her desire for variety by dating boys from bygone eras, thank you very much.

Sure, dating ghosts has its downsides. Like a big example would be: everyone thinks you're a single weirdo. But that's only because people can't see what Tansy can see. Who needs a human tongue on your vagina when you can have a spirit move through your whole entire body? Tansy thinks spirit possession is much better than sex. I mean, she's never had sex so she can't say for certain, but she thinks she would think that spirit possession is much better than sex. And when Tansy says spirit possession, she doesn't mean eyes rolling in the back of your head or speaking in tongues or crawling on the ceiling like a spider. Spirit possession is like, holding hands if your two hands folded into one. It's like rounding the bases in an endless ring. When you've got a human boy, there's no way to tell if he really loves you. Just no way. All alive boys are liars (fact). But a ghost boyfriend proves that he loves you every time he appears to you, again and again, time after time.

Tansy fancies herself modern day New Jersey's answer to Edwige Fenech. She lives in Manahawkin with her grandpa and thinks Manahawkin is lame as hell (fact). Grandpa Amos is the only living person with whom she is close. He's raised her since she was a baby, after her mother killed herself and then her father followed suit shortly thereafter. Tansy's Grandma Orla, Tansy's mother's own mother, killed herself too, when Tansy's mom was just a little girl. But at least Tansy's mom was eight when it happened, so she got a few good years and, therefore, what Tansy believes to be the better deal. This is why Tansy feels a special kinship to suicide spirits: she thinks it's in her genes. Tansy's not necessarily saying she's going to kill herself one day, but she's also not not saying that. Suicides are her favorite ghosts to date and they usually make great boyfriends.

Despite her clairvoyance, Tansy has never been able to summon the spirits of her parents. She simply can't conjure them, no matter how hard she tries. She used to try every day, but now she aims for once a week. Especially because she's so busy now. She's busy with Johnny, busy being in love.

When the story begins, Tansy is pretty fully immersed in the honeymoon phase of her relationship with a ghost named Johnny Appleseed. Two things about Johnny Appleseed: 1) Appleseed is not his real last name, and 2) he was murdered in the 1950s and pretty brutally, Tansy might add. (Dating murder victims is a close second to dating suicides.) Johnny is fun and handsome and amazing boyfriend material. Her infatuation with him distracts Tansy from all the things going terribly in her life, such as: Grandpa Amos's ailing health and erratic behavior. Having to go to high school and tolerate her living peers. Bills that need to be paid and can't be paid. But it's fine, everything's fine, just so long as Tansy has Johnny and they are in love.

One day, Tansy and Johnny get in a really big fight, and he disappears. She tries to spend a few days focusing on herself, enjoying some me time, but she soon realizes she doesn't care about herself that much, and me time is boring. When she tries to conjure Johnny's spirit, she can't. Tansy tries every trick in her bag, but it's no use. He won't come to her. So now Tansy's thinking, oh shit. What if Johnny becomes like the ghosts of her parents? What if she never sees him again? During their fight, Tansy said something she didn't mean to, and in doing so, she thinks she may have accidentally banished his spirit.

Tansy summons TBD (a mentor of some kind? A friend? A ghost she used to talk to when she was little?) who tells her that Johnny's gone missing in the underworld. No further explanation, this just happens sometimes. Rumors about what happens to vanished spirits in the underworld abound (including an urban legend about an entity that collects them) but no one knows for sure. (Or should it not be a rumor? Should Tansy's friend know, and be fearful?) TBD advises her to move on. Wash that spirit right out of her hair! And besides: it's not like Tansy can go down there and look for Johnny herself?

The next day, while Tansy is out grocery shopping with Grandpa Amos, he forgets where he is and what he's doing, and wanders out into the street. He is nearly hit by a car and taken to the hospital, where a doctor informs Tansy that it's likely time to consider assisted living.

Tansy is more miserable than ever. And what's worse is her clairvoyance is malfunctioning—she's having a hard time seeing or hearing ghosts. She worries that the spirit world might be lost to her forever, and she doesn't understand why. And she's sure as shit not about to stay stuck in Manahawkin, without any ghosts and soon to be without Grandpa Amos. Fuck, that. Then Tansy gets an idea: who's to say she *can't* go down to the underworld and find Johnny/figure out what the fuck's going on? From what she knows through her research on the occult (Tansy is a self-proclaimed white witch), she'll need a guide, because she's a living being. Tansy's never been to the underworld, but she knows someone who has...

Lowell Dunbar. Lowell Dunbar is Tansy's arch nemesis. He was famous for like, five minutes when he fell through ice on a lake in an unseasonably cold winter and was dead for like, 45 minutes but then came back to life. He goes to high school with Tansy and she hates his fucking guts. However! However... Tansy knows he spent time in the underworld. She doesn't know what he knows, if he even remembers his time in the underworld or if he can serve as her guide, but she is not above asking for Lowell Dunbar's help. Desperate times.

Tansy asks Lowell for help. He is resistant at first but ultimately agrees because 1) he too is miserable and 2) he's totally secretly in love with Tansy (unbeknownst to Tansy). Still trying to decide where Tansy and Lowell cross the threshold into the underworld, and how.

## Act Two

Even though Lowell was only dead for 45 minutes, it's like he spent 5 years living and working in the underworld, because the concept of time is elastic. He might not be a seasoned expert, but he knows his way around. The first thing he and Tansy need to do is rent a car because yes, the underworld is a big place and you need a reliable mode of transportation. They can't exactly just wander around aimlessly. Tansy is in awe of the underworld, especially because...it doesn't seem especially different from the real world. There are homes, in towns, there are cars, and bars, and jobs, but instead of people there are spirits. Lowell tells Tansy that in the underworld it's dark all the time, though there are a couple towns that try to (embarrassingly) replicate sunlight. There's no moon, but the sky is studded with stars. The stars in the underworld can be one of four colors: pale yellow, pale green, lavender, and red. The underworld is separated into regions, sort of like counties, similar to the circles in Dante's *Inferno*, only not as dire. And the reasoning behind what kinds of spirits inhabit the underworld, and why, isn't as moralistic. The underworld isn't necessarily full of sinners who have transgressed, or at least that's not the only way a ghost winds up in the underworld. It's not heaven and it's not hell; it's different.

Because Lowell used to live in the underworld, he too has heard the rumors surrounding what happens to spirits that go missing. Some spirits believe that the missing are taken by demons, which are generally just acknowledged to be the bad spirits in the underworld. Tansy asks Lowell if angels exist too, and he tells her that he thinks so, but it's sort of a fabled notion because the angels are always undercover. Once they've rented a car the first stop they make is to The Typical Haunt, a dive bar that Lowell used to frequent when he lived in Region 1 (not the actual name, just still deciding what the first region Tansy and Lowell will drive through is/actually still thinking about all the regions). There they meet the amiable dead bartender, who helps point them in the right direction of where they need to go next. Tansy has brought with her a picture of Johnny that she found in an archive at the library.

Tansy and Lowell begin their road trip through the underworld, following clues and meeting other spirits along the way. They travel through the various neighborhoods of the underworld, and the ghosts that inhabit each region are largely determined by what sort of spirit they are. Sometimes spirits gravitate towards a specific neighborhood because they died in a similar fashion. Other spirits create neighborhoods that strive to emulate the eras during which they lived. But most importantly, Tansy begins to realize that these regions each feel strangely familiar. (I'm still brainstorming ways that the underworld can be an extension of Tansy, reveal things about her and also, about her parents.) At each stop that she and Lowell make, Tansy learns something new about her parents.

**Midpoint:** Tansy discovers that it was actually her parents who kidnapped Johnny.

The further through the underworld that Tansy and Lowell travel, the closer they get to the dark forest that borders the known edges of underworld, the most "underworldly" part of the underworld. Most of the chill spirits—which is, to say, not the freaks—live in the populated

neighborhoods and towns. Ghosts who live in isolation, out in phantasmal nature, are more unpredictable and possibly dangerous. The further into the outskirts of the underworld Tansy and Lowell go, the spookier the terrain becomes.

### Act Three

AND NOW I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENS NEXT AS I RESIST THE URGE TO CURL UP LIKE A ROLY POLY BUG AND DISAPPEAR INTO A PILE OF STUFFED ANIMALS \*and she was never seen again\*

I do know that I want Tansy's parents to have kidnapped Johnny because they think it's what's best for her. And that's why they never came to her when she called to them: because they know it's not good. They want her to be present in the world. They want her to stay alive. And in kidnapping Johnny, possibly something bad happened to them? Because Johnny is actually an aforementioned demon????

And can Johnny be bad without being totally bad? Can I set up a love triangle between Tansy and Johnny and Lowell? Tansy literally has to choose between life and death? I don't know!

I don't know anything.

Act One

- \* Tansy and Johnny are hanging out in a graveyard, like an average teenage couple, until someone comes along and we realize this other person can't see Johnny, he is a ghost and Tansy is alone
- \* Tansy rides her bike home to the dilapidated house she shares with her (what Tansy perceives to be evil) Aunt Isla
  - o Aunt Isla was her mother Iris's identical twin
  - o Scenes establishing unhappy home life
  - o Tansy is unable to contact the spirits of her parents, and never has
    - She has a little ritual wherein she tries to contact them, every day, but we don't realize what the ritual is yet
- \* Tansy spends an average day at school, spends lunch at the edge of the field with Johnny, she's isolated from her peers
  - o Scenes establishing social life, or lack thereof
  - o Tansy is pretty but she's not popular, dresses weird, long dark hair
  - o Where we first see Lowell, he is also an outsider, he and Tansy are not friends—but he's clearly got the hots for her
    - We don't know yet why Lowell's significant, just think he's an average weird nerd, everyone calls him Dead Boy
      - We know his nickname but don't know what it means yet
- \* Tansy's birthday is coming up, and she's about to turn the age older than Johnny was when he died—she's growing up without him
- \* Tansy has a genius idea: if she kills herself before her birthday, they can be the same age forever. If she joins him in the underworld, they can be together forever.
  - o Johnny feigns resistance, but Tansy is like, so what. She's probably gonna do it one day anyway (it's genetic)
  - o Tansy frames it as this sweeping, darkly romantic thing: they can uncross their stars
    - Johnny is on board. He's picking up what she's putting down!
- \* Tansy develops romantic master plan: she's going to kill herself, in the woods, on the night of the full moon, near a stream, with Johnny present, with him there to guide her into the underworld, "carry her over the threshold", she's gonna wear a white dress (she's almost planning this like a wedding)
  - o A few quick scenes of Tansy getting her affairs in order. Good, bye world!
- \* The night of the full moon arrives, Tansy retreats into the woods to enact her plan...and Johnny is a no-show. What's worse, Tansy is unable to summon his spirit. It's like his ghost has disappeared.
  - o This is where we discover (or are reminded) that Tansy is also unable to summon the spirits of her parents and always has been
  - o Scenes of a miserable Tansy without Johnny, "post breakup"
- \* Tansy receives Johnny's Princess Leia hologram, now she knows he's in trouble
  - o Something in the message, when relayed later to Lowell, will trigger a recognition he makes the connection to Collector Specter, *a bad ghost*



- Certain ghosts ferment into demons
- \* Tansy decides, fuck this. She needs to travel to the underworld to find Johnny and get him back, so she reaches out to Lowell, THE Dead Boy
  - Now we discover the origin of Lowell's nickname
  - Reaching out is tricky because—
  - Lowell is Tansy's (self-appointed) nemesis! Tansy is, in a weird way, jealous of Lowell—he's been dead **and** came back to life, he had his cake and ate it too
    - They're the two weirdest kids in school, but they hate each other (meaning, Tansy hates Lowell and Lowell just doesn't really like anyone EXCEPT, of course, Tansy on the down low, and a lot)
- \* Audience, meet Lowell: used to be a super cool fun guy, popular jock, now he's a fucking freaked-out isolated weirdo, he doesn't know if the underworld is real, or how to make sense of what he experienced, nobody believed him, he feels disconnected from the world
  - He feels a connection to Tansy, because she's the only one who believes him (plus he's secretly in love with her)
- \* Tansy convinces Lowell to help her—he's scared to go back, but also hoping to make sense of everything he's seen and experienced, gain closure
  - Lowell lost something in the underworld, "a piece" of himself
    - An actual piece, something that was taken (by Specter) that fundamentally changed who he was, and he'll never be the same until he gets it back
      - What's the missing piece, guys?! Open to suggestions
- \* Tansy and Johnny gather supplies to pass through the gates to the underworld (cross the threshold)
- \* They lock themselves in Tansy's attic, and take some sort of medication that stops their hearts. They have to hold hands to stay together when they die.
  - Tansy and Lowell know they will have a limited amount of time in the underworld, but not sure exactly how much
  - When the medication wears off, they will be brought back to life, exit the underworld and must re-enter (medication becomes more dangerous with repeated use, weakens the heart)
  - Though their hearts will be stopped for only a few minutes, time in the underworld is elastic and it's actually like several days
    - This is why Lowell being dead for forty minutes was like spending five years in the underworld

## Act Two

- \* Act 2, Sequence 1: Fun and Games
- \* Lowell and Tansy arrive in the underworld, which is not at all how she expected
  - Exploring the underworld: it's like a dream come true for Tansy, she loves it, darkly weird and off-kilter, but amazing (or so she thinks)
- \* When they arrive in the underworld they emerge in Lowell's old neighborhood (where he went the first time he died, where his spirit gravitated towards)
  - There aren't a lot of females in this neighborhood, it's largely populated by young men and teenage boys (and dictated by/revolves around the types of things that guys like) [not married to this idea, just trying it out!]
- \* Lowell explains to her some of the rules and the lay of the land

- Big Example: Spirits who kill themselves, *again*, in the underworld get double damned
  - When a spirit gets double damned they go somewhere especially bad, so...probably we should be careful/not die while we're down here, advises Lowell
- \* Side note: Collector Specter collects wayward spirits (like a bounty hunter) and brings them to the under the underworld. He double damns spirits for (the equivalent of) Satan, though nobody in the underworld refers to him as Satan. Still, citizens of the underworld know of, and fear, his existence.
- \* Lowell takes Tansy to The Typical Haunt, the local bar in his neighborhood, greets an old friend, the bartender and Lowell's old roommate, Binx
  - Tansy relays Johnny's message to Binx and Binx is like, oh: it sounds like he's in Luminocity (a major metropolitan city in the underworld)
- \* Luminocity is kind of far, so Tansy and Lowell will need to rent a car in the "morning"
  - It's always dark in the underworld, but time of day is dictated by the color of the stars
    - The stars change colors at four distinct times of the day
- \* Binx offers to let Tansy and Lowell crash at his place for the night
  - Spend the night in Lowell's old room
- \* Tansy and Lowell make the drive to Luminocity, Tansy takes in the scenery on their drive, sees the landscape of the underworld through the car window
- \* Tansy sees the crying girl, walking and wandering on the side of the road, doesn't think much of her at the time
- \* Tansy and Lowell arrive in Luminocity
  - ***Making Spirits Bright!***
    - Luminocity is a major tourist attraction in the underworld because it attempts to replicate the look of real sunlight
- \* While in the city, Tansy and Lowell witness Collector Specter collect a spirit and it's hella scary
- \* End of sequence: Tansy and Lowell spot Johnny with Specter
  - Tansy thinks Johnny has been taken (doesn't yet realize that he's with Specter because he's working for him)
- \* Act 2, Sequence 2: Chasing Johnny
- \* Both Tansy and Lowell are rattled—Tansy by spotting (and then losing sight of) Johnny and Lowell because it's the first time he's seen Specter since his missing piece was taken. But, they're now both emboldened. Lowell wants his piece back and Tansy wants her piece back!
- \* Tansy sees the crying girl again, she recognizes her from the side of the road and points her out to Lowell but when they follow her, she disappears
  - Lowell tells Tansy he knows what kind of spirit she is: someone who was brought here unwillingly, known as an Accidental
    - Accidentals are rare in this layer of the underworld, because it's largely inhabited by suicide spirits
    - Accidentals look different from the majority of the population, i.e. the suicide spirits (still deciding how exactly)

- \* Lowell encourages Tansy to forget about the crying girl for now, even though she has an inkling that they're being followed. Lowell is like, we have work to do and we're kind of on a clock here, sister!
- \* Tansy and Lowell see the Travel Agent
  - o The Travel Agents helps guide dissatisfied spirits to alternative regions
  - o They tell the Travel Agent that they want to see Collector Specter and he's like, why! That's a terrible idea! They tell the Travel Agent that they're looking for something, and none of ya business!
  - o He sells them two tickets to The Land of Milk and Honey, a seedy amusement park/casino town where Collector Specter's goons are known to spend their downtime
- \* Tansy and Lowell take the Night Train to The Land of Milk and Honey
  - o The Night Train is a mode of public transport in the underworld that travels through a series of tunnels to regions in the Darkness on the Edge
    - The Darkness on the Edge is the area that circles around the entirety of the outskirts of this layer of the underworld, and is the most underworldly part of this layer
- \* The Land of Milk and Honey seems really fun and gross, and is full of troubled suicide spirits still (happily) grappling with in death the addictions that they grappled with in life
- \* **Midpoint:** Tansy catches a glimpse of Johnny, tries to get to him, attempts to rescue him. He sees her too, and it's almost a reunion! At last!
  - o Lowell is bittersweet saddened by the sight of Tansy's sheer joy (we begin to see how deeply he has grown to care for her)
- \* BUT before Tansy and Johnny embrace, he is quickly snatched away by two spirits that...
- \* Tansy recognizes as her parents! Tansy is stunned...she's never seen them before
  - o Tansy is taken aback by how much her mother looks like Aunt Isla (they were identical twins, after all)
- \* But the touching moment is quickly overcome by thoughts of: do her parents work for Collector Specter??? Are her parents possibly evil???? What gives?!
- \* Tansy parents shout something to her: Don't come back? Something about it not being time yet? These are Option A ideas, but I want Tansy's parents to say something to her that confuses her, and she attempts to follow them in order to decipher, but...
- \* Just as Tansy is about to follow the spirits of her parents...she is pulled out of the underworld at the worst, possible, time
- \* Act 2, Sequence 3: Back to Life
- \* Tansy is revived by Aunt Isla, who found her and Lowell unconscious in the attic (still holding hands). Lowell is revived next and he, too, is pulled out of the underworld.
  - o Aunt Isla's despair, and relief, helps Tansy to realize that her aunt really does care about her
  - o Tansy doesn't want Aunt Isla to think she's crazy (at first), so she tells her that she and Lowell made a suicide pact, they're really sorry, they won't do it again. Either this, or maybe that they were trying drugs? TBD
- \* Tansy has all these questions about her parents now, thinks they're bad now, but her Aunt Isla is like, what? No!

- We discover that Aunt Isla loved Iris, was devastated by her suicide. She doesn't hate Tansy...she's just someone who was left behind too
- \* Tansy decides to investigate her parents lives, in the real world
- \* This is what Tansy knows about her parents so far, simply from what her Aunt Isla has been willing to tell her, which is, admittedly, not much:
  - Tansy parents met during their freshman year at Rutgers, and they were very very very in love
  - Tansy's mother Iris got pregnant unexpectedly at nineteen, and she and Tansy's father Henry didn't necessarily want children
  - Iris and Henry dropped out of school and moved back to Manahawkin (Iris and Isla's hometown) to have Tansy
  - Iris suffered from post partum depression, and killed herself before Tansy turned two
  - Henry followed soon after, left Isla as Tansy's guardian
  - Tansy has lived with Aunt Isla in Manahawkin ever since
  - Manahawkin sucks hard
- \* What Tansy *discovers* about her parents (and still figuring out the details of how/where/from who):
  - Iris was schizophrenic—in her suicide note, she spoke of wanting to hurt herself and, in her darkest moments, hurt Tansy
  - Isla actually began to care for Tansy, willingly, before Henry killed himself (Tansy never realized this, she had assumed that Isla thought she was a burden and Isla didn't want to hurt Tansy by telling her that her father thought he was unfit to care for her)
  - Henry thought he was unfit to care for Tansy because he couldn't bear to be alive without Iris, thought Tansy would have a better life without him
- \* Tansy wants to share all this information with Lowell, but—
- \* Lowell got in trouble when Aunt Isla told his (religious?) parents what happened, he's not supposed to see Tansy any more, so she's on her own
  - Plus, Lowell feels hurt because he knows he has feelings for Tansy that she doesn't reciprocate, because Johnny is her #1
  - Also, Lowell is like, how much do you really even know about Johnny, Tansy? Maybe you should buy another vowel
- \* So Lowell no longer has Tansy's back, and she can't shake this bad feeling. Tansy feels like something isn't quite right. She can't stop thinking about something that was said to her in the underworld about Johnny (some sort of yet to be determined clue, or maybe it's whatever her parents tried to tell her before she came back to life—open to suggestions!)
- \* Tansy decides to do some research on Johnny, wants to know more about his life when he was alive
  - Tansy thinks she already knows the story of how Johnny died (but she thinks *wrong*)
- \* Tansy goes to the library on Long Beach Island (where she knows Johnny killed himself) and looks through the newspaper archives, using a microfilm reader she sees an old local news story and discovers...
  - LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEARTS FOUND DEAD

- There were two dead bodies when Johnny was discovered dead, his body and the body of a teenage girl named Judy, whom Tansy recognizes from her photo to be...the crying girl. Judy is the crying girl, the Accidental from the underworld who was following her!
  - The newspaper article paints them as a troubled Romeo and Juliet (speculates that they killed themselves together)
  - At first, Tansy is jealous. She's like, um what. Johnny had a suicide pact with another girl?!
- \* NOT OKAY. Tansy is more confused then ever, and homegirl wants answers!
- \* Sequence 4: Finding Judy the Crying Girl
- \* Tansy decides to return to the underworld, to get to the bottom of what's going on
- \* But it's going to be trickier this time around: the medication is more dangerous with repeated use, and she thinks she'll have to go alone
- \* Tansy tries to explain the situation to Aunt Isla, but Aunt Isla thinks she's making it up, or even worse—that maybe Tansy is starting to show signs of her mother's illness, hearing voices, succumbing to dark fantasies
  - But Tansy is like, I'm not crazy/I'm just clairvoyant! You have to believe me! The underworld is real, ghosts are real, I saw my parents' spirits and something's afoot! But—
  - Aunt Isla doesn't believe her, is very concerned
- \* Tansy reaches back out to Lowell, he agrees to meet her briefly after school
  - She tells him she's going back to the underworld and she's going to do it tonight, in the spot on Long Beach Island where Johnny killed himself with Judy in 1952
  - But Lowell tells her he doesn't want to go, it's not worth the risk (plus he's still butthurt)
  - Tansy is like, but what about your missing piece! Don't you want it back?
  - Lowell is like, nah I'm good
- \* Tansy thinks she has to go it alone, she rides her bike to Long Beach Island in the dark, to the place where Johnny and Judy died
- \* But of course Lowell shows up to meet her (he loves her, remember!) and they venture back to the underworld together, hand in hand
- \* Tansy and Lowell emerge in a place Lowell doesn't recognize, where he's never been, beside an expansive body of water (there's no ocean in the underworld, or if there is, Lowell's never seen it)
  - The strange place is a retreat for Accidentals beside a lighthouse
  - Mermaid Colony
  - They avoid ghosts like me. Like what? Boys.
- \* Tansy and Lowell find Judy, they confront her
- \* Judy stops crying and tells Tansy her story
  - Find out it was a murder suicide
    - The crying girl doesn't belong in this layer of the underworld
    - Johnny's not a typical suicide spirit, he committed a murder suicide
    - Spirits who have committed murder suicides are typically recruited to work for Collector Specter
      - They have less scruples about double damning innocent spirits for pay

- \* Tansy asks Judy if she knows where she might be able to find Johnny, explains that she saw her parents take him
  - When Tansy describes to Judy what happened, she tells Tansy that her parents sounds like guardian angels
    - Guardian angels are suicide spirits who devote themselves to keeping safe a loved one that they left behind
      - Many (not all, but many) of the suicide spirits in the underworld are selfish and self-serving, but those who choose to work as guardian angels deeply care about someone they left behind (it's a hard, full-time job)
      - They did not give up their jobs as parents, even from beyond the grave they're watching out for her
- \* Judy tells Tansy that she can signal Johnny, but she warns her against it (this is maybe an Option A idea)
  - Tansy is like, what! I could have just summoned Johnny this whole time?
  - But Judy tells her it's not foolproof, and tells Tansy not to do it here, so that she doesn't endanger the other Accidentals (who are easy-pickings to get double damned)
- \* Lowell and Tansy summon Johnny (still figuring this out) and he comes for her, they are finally reunited! But—
- \* Tansy and Lowell are captured by Specter (due to Johnny's betrayal)
  - Specter also has Tansy's parents held captive
  - Johnny works for Collector Specter!
- \* Johnny is evil and her parents are good! By kidnapping Johnny, they were only trying to help Tansy all along

### Act Three

- \* Collector Specter takes Tansy and Lowell to the Blue Forest
  - Specter wants to send Tansy's spirit under the underworld, because clairvoyants are valuable, their psychic energy makes them desirable
- \* They reach a glittering black lake, and under the water is the portal to under the underworld
  - Leads to a deeper, darker layer where the Not-Satan resides
  - Spirits are double damned by drowning in the lake
- \* At some point (again, still figuring a lot of these details out, bear with me!) Lowell sees an opportunity to retrieve his missing piece and he ostensibly abandons Tansy, choosing himself over her
- \* Collector Specter & Co. reach the lake, and...
- \* Hell Revealed
- \* The glittering black lake begins to churn, ready to swallow Tansy and her parents, until—
- \* Johnny has a change of heart
  - Why? He's a bad bad boy, but he does actually love Tansy and he doesn't want to see her double damned
- \* Johnny offers Tansy an opportunity to escape, but she'd have to leave her parents behind, condemning them to get double damned

- \* Iris and Henry plead with Tansy to go, save yourself! Don't get double damned, baby girl!
- \* But Tansy refuses to leave her parents to this terrible fate!
- \* Also deciding if: Aunt Isla shows up! She has taken a leap of faith (i.e. temporarily killed herself) and followed Tansy into the underworld to help her
- \* Also definitely still need to figure out:
  - How does Tansy ultimately defeat or escape from Specter, rescuing both her parents and herself?
  - How does Aunt Isla factor into this
  - And how does Lowell factor into this? He, of course, shows up in the nick of time to help Tansy save the day
    - Lowell is willing to sacrifice his missing piece for Tansy
- \* The day is saved, but still, Johnny is a desperate loser
  - He pleads with Tansy to kill herself, to stay with him in the underworld—they can be together forever, he loves her, they're "soul mates"
- \* But Tansy is like fuck you, loser!
  - Johnny gets double damned?
- \* Tansy has to choose between life and death
  - Does she stay in the underworld with her parents that love her, or does she come back to life with Lowell?
- \* Tansy chooses Lowell, says good bye to her parents
  - Her parents tell her not to worry, they'll see each other again one day—when it's Tansy's time
  - Also a touching moment where Iris and Isla are reunited, the twins have a moment together before Isla must come back to life
- \* Tansy and Lowell leave the underworld and they come back to life too, wake up together on Long Beach Island, hand in hand
- \* Tansy and Lowell make each other think that alive is not such a bad thing to be
- \* Tansy sets forth to live her life as a normal(-ish) teen, her life laid out before her like a map to be drawn!
- \* The End!

EXT. SAINT MARY'S CEMETERY - NIGHT

TANSY ABNER (16, long dark hair that falls down her back, blue pools of eye shadow above two brown eyes) stands before two modest twin HEADSTONES, for a husband and wife. The dates of death on each headstone are only a few months apart. The birth dates indicate less than twenty-five years spent alive.

Tansy tries to summon a spirit, which begins with her lighting two candles and devolves into her dancing like Courtney Cox in Bruce Springsteen's "Dancing in the Dark" video. The conjuring doesn't work, because it never works.

Tansy is bummed but she's used to this outcome. She blows out the candles and packs them into her knapsack like it's no big thing. Beside her is JOHNNY, and he's super supportive. Practice make perfect, you'll get it eventually, hang in there, sweetness. He's such great boyfriend material!

Tansy and Johnny begin to walk through the cemetery, hand in hand. Tansy asks if Johnny wants to see it on their way out, and he does.

EXT. PATCH OF GRAVEYARD - CONTINUOUS

They follow a familiar path to a pretty and secluded corner of the cemetery. They look down at a grave, one they've clearly been to several times before, and Johnny complains that a seagull took a shit on it. Tansy's like, that's good luck. Or so they say in Italy! But then she's like oh... I think it's on your head and not on your grave, though.

Suddenly, the grumpy GROUNDSKEEPER (age: unknown) approaches Tansy and scolds her for being in the cemetery after visiting hours, alone, in the middle of the night, again. Tansy turns to face the grave digger and Johnny is no longer with her. The grave digger cannot see him, and Tansy is alone. The grave is Johnny's.

The grave digger is like, don't your parents keep track of you? And Tansy is like, you know my parents are dead, ya wrinkly old prick! Lick my butthole!

The grave digger does not oblige, but he does shoo Tansy away from the grave. Tansy gives him the finger and walks off into the night with her little nose in the air.

**\*\*Still deciding what I want it to look like when a spirit returns to the underworld, but rest assured I am brainstorming a stronger supernatural moment!\*\***

EXT. WOODED STREET - NIGHT

Tansy rides a purple Schwinn cruiser bike down a wooded road through Manahawkin, New Jersey.



INT. TANSY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Tansy flips a switch in her bedroom, illuminating a intricate network of rainbow-colored string lights. She removes several items from her knapsack and arranges them on a little makeshift altar, which sits below a poster for Bruce Springsteen's Tunnel of Love album cover. She kisses two fingers, then uses the kissed fingers to trace a circle around Bruce Springsteen's Tunnel of Love face. Tansy crawls into bed and goes to sleep.

INT. TANSY'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Tansy has breakfast before school, moody as ever. She dresses not like she's going to high school in New Jersey in 2017, but rather like she's being Audrey Hepburn for Halloween.

AUNT ISLA (late 30s, wearing scrubs) gathers her belongings for work in a hurry, shuffling around the kitchen, paying little attention to Tansy.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The students of SRHS torment a long-suffering HISTORY TEACHER in class. A brutish jock picks on LOWELL (16, handsome-ish and brooding), whom the students refer to as DEAD BOY.

Tansy makes a strange remark correcting the history teacher, and the students snidely snicker. The bell rings and the students quickly filter out of the classroom, the history teacher's closing remarks falling on deaf ears.

As she goes, the history teacher beckons Tansy. He asks why she's stopped going to History Club meetings. Tansy's like, sorry, I've got a new boyfriend and we're spending a lot of time together.

The history teacher tells her that that's all fine and well, but he expresses concern over the decline in the quality of her assignments. He asks if she's also struggling in her other classes. He tells her that junior year is important when applying to colleges.

Tansy is cheerful and evasive, and tells the history teacher that she has to run. Lunchtime!

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Students sit in clustered groups, scattered about the courtyard eating lunch, talking and laughing.

Tansy walks her tray of reduced cost lunch out onto the football field, alone.

Lowell, holding a sad little bagged lunch, watching Tansy cheerily pass him by, unnoticed. A jock quickly snatches the bag out of his hands and keeps walking. Lowell sighs heavily.

EXT. EDGE OF THE FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Tansy sets down her lunch at the edge of the field, near the threshold of the surrounding woods. She cautiously looks around, then pulls a RED CANDLE out of her knapsack. She lights the candle, closing her eyes, and in a FLURRY OF BLUE LIGHT Johnny appears.

Johnny is depressed, because Tansy's birthday is coming up, and she's about to turn the age just above Johnny was when he died. She's growing up without him. Tansy tries to cheer him up. The bell rings and lunch is over, Tansy has to go back to class. They agree to meet tonight, date night, the usual.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Lowell and several other teenage boys jostle into the locker room to get changed for P.E. Lowell retreats to an isolated corner of the locker room and removes his shirt, hunched and self-conscious. The brutish jock from earlier suddenly shoves Lowell from behind. He asks to take a look at the scar, wants to rub it for good luck, is being a dickhead, etc.

Several boys laugh at a large, purplish-blue CRESCENT-SHAPED SCAR right below Lowell's rib cage. More Dead Boy jokes.

The coach comes into the locker room and breaks it up. He gives Lowell a sympathetic glance as the other boys jog out of the locker room.

Unnoticed by anyone, the scar below Lowell's rib cage subtly CHANGES COLOR. Lowell pulls on his shirt and follows the others outside.

\*\*Wondering if this is an awkward place for this scene, to transition from Tansy and Johnny right to Lowell before gym. I'm trying to integrate him sooner, interested to know if this works all right!\*\*

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Forlorn and distracted, Tansy absentmindedly listens to an ENGLISH TEACHER lecture on a classic romance about star-crossed lovers. Lowell doodles in the back row.

A light bulb goes off in Tansy's mind.

INT. TANSY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Tansy gets ready for the evening's date with Johnny, goes heavy on the makeup. She leaves the items on her altar, her usual spread of talismans, behind.

INT. TANSY'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Tansy tries to sneak past Aunt Isla making dinner in the kitchen, but Aunt Isla catches her before she goes. She tells Tansy that the principal called, and Tansy is in danger of repeating junior year if she doesn't bring up her grades.

Tansy is uninterested in the details, and wants to hurry out before she's late. Late to where? Aunt Isla admonishes Tansy for not taking this seriously. Does she want to stay stuck in Manahawkin forever? Tansy's like, maybe I do!

Aunt Isla brings up Tansy's parents, and Tansy recoils. This leads to an argument which reveals that Tansy's parents are dead. Aunt Isla tells Tansy that her parents might not be around anymore, but they're still in her heart. And Tansy is like, bullshit, idiot! I know they're not! They might be somewhere but they're sure as shit not here with me in my mf heart! YOU SOUND STUPID, AUNT ISLA. They exchange a few more unkind remarks before Tansy runs out the front door and hops on her bike, riding off into the twilight. Aunt Isla shakes her head, disappointed.

EXT. SPECIAL SPOT - NIGHT

Tansy meets Johnny at their special spot (location TBD). She shares with Johnny her brilliant master plan: she's going to kill herself before her birthday, so that she and Johnny can be together forever.

At first, Johnny feigns resistance, but Tansy is like, so what who cares. She's probably gonna do it one day anyway! It's genetic. Tansy illustrates her suicide as this sweeping, darkly romantic thing. Tansy can take it upon herself to uncross their stars. Johnny's faux reluctance waivers. You would be willing to do that for me, that's so romantic, you're one hell of a gal, etc. He's picking up what she's putting down!

Tansy lays out the details...

She's going to kill herself, in the woods, on the night of the full moon, near a stream, with Johnny present, with him there to guide her into the underworld, "carry her over the threshold."

MONTAGE:

--Tansy writes her last will and testament. She leaves "all my most beloved possessions, including the entirety of my collection of valuable Bruce Springsteen memorabilia, to NOBODY LOL."

--Tansy buys a white dress from a consignment shop in town.

--Tansy spends one final, anxious and antsy day at school.

INT. TANSY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The night of the full moon has arrived. Tansy carefully styles her hair and makeup, using a picture from an old magazine as a

reference. She puts on the white dress. She examines her child bride appearance in the mirror.

It's go time.

Tansy leaves her suicide note, and the accompanying will, neatly arranged on her desk. She kisses all her stuffed animals good bye. She leaves everything on her altar behind, except for an old and tiny photo of her parents on their wedding day, which she slips into her knapsack.

INT. TANSY'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Tansy sneaks past Aunt Isla making dinner with the TV on in the kitchen. This time, Aunt Isla does not catch Tansy before she goes.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Tansy walks through the woods until she comes upon a stream, the previously discussed location of her ideal suicide spot. Tansy pulls a little compact mirror out her knapsack, checks her appearance, adjusts her hair, and smiles. She triple checks the sleeping pills she's brought. She excitedly waits for Johnny to arrive.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Slumped on a log near the stream, Tansy has fallen asleep... but not because of the sleeping pills. She awakes suddenly with a start, looks around. The moon hangs high in the sky.

Johnny never showed.

Tansy quickly grabs her knapsack and runs out of frame.

EXT. SAINT MARY'S CEMETERY - NIGHT

Tansy runs through the cemetery to the familiar patch of graveyard where Johnny's tombstone rests.

Tansy attempts to summon Johnny's spirit again and it doesn't work. Starting to panic, tears well up in Tansy's eyes. She is interrupted by the groundskeeper.

Tansy screams at the groundskeeper and runs away.

INT. TANSY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Tansy crawls into bed, fully clothed, snotty nosed, and cries herself to sleep.

INT. TANSY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Tansy slowly wakes up the next morning. She sits up in bed and her expression sinks.

With renewed determination, Tansy flings off her comforter and climbs out of bed.

INT. PARANORMAL BOOKS & CURIOSITIES - DAY

Still clad in the rumpled white dress and yet to wash off the remnants of last night's makeup, Tansy walks into a new age bookstore. A little bell jingles on the door overhead.

The bookstore looks completely empty. After a beat, MISS MARION (early 40s, long braided hair, unplaceable accent) emerges from a back room to greet the store's only customer.

Tansy asks if she sells any crystal balls, and Miss Marion points her in the right direction. Tansy eye's go wide at the prices of the crystal balls.

Miss Marion leaves Tansy on her own to browse, returning to the back room. Let me know if you have any questions, etc.

Tansy spends about four seconds pretending to inconspicuously look around before she slips one of the crystal balls into her knapsack and makes a beeline for the exit.

INT. TANSY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Freshly showered and finally out of the white dress, Tansy lights several candles around her bedroom. She pulls the crystal ball out of her knapsack. She carefully holds the crystal ball up to her face and stares into it.

Tansy begins to shake the crystal ball, gently at first, then more vehemently, like a Magic 8-Ball. When nothing happens, she carelessly tosses the crystal ball on her bed. Titty!

Tansy clenches her fists in frustration.

INT. TANSY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tansy watches a classic film with her laptop on her chest in bed, and cries. All of a sudden, the mirror above her vanity fogs up. Tansy closes her laptop and wanders to the mirror.

Tansy looks into the mirror, but instead of her reflection she sees Johnny's. Tansy excitedly calls out to him, but Johnny does not, or cannot, respond. He relays a message to her (the Princess Leia hologram). Johnny is in trouble.

Gobsmacked, Tansy attempts to speak to Johnny's reflection in the mirror again, but his message simply starts over from the beginning. It's almost as if it's been pre-recorded...

Suddenly, the flames on the candles scattered around Tansy's room extinguish, and the mirror de-fogs as Johnny's reflection disappears. Tansy looks into the mirror and sees only her own astonished face.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. SCHOOL BUS (MOVING) - EARLY MORNING

Lowell is slumped in a seat near the back of the bus. He yawns absentmindedly and stares out the window as the bus rumbles through the darkness.

INT. VAST GRITTY HALLWAY - MORNING

Lowell groggily retrieves books from his locker when he hears a familiar voice beside him. He turns to see Tansy, smiling at him expectantly.

Lowell mumbles a reciprocated Good Morning and then, suppressing a freak-out, awkwardly turns on his heels and walks down the hall into the sea of students.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Lowell eats lunch alone at an isolated empty table. Without an invitation, Tansy sits across from him at the table. Lowell looks around, confused, as if in search of a witness to corroborate Tansy's presence.

After a requisite amount of stilted small talk, during which Tansy acknowledges that she has seldom paid Lowell even the bare minimum amount of attention, she cuts to the chase--

Tansy wants to talk about the underworld. She tries to casually mention something from Johnny's mirror message.

Immediately, Lowell shuts down. He stands from the table, ditches the rest of his lunch in the trash, and begins to walk away.

Tansy quickly gets up to follow him.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Tansy catches up to Lowell as he hurries across the football field towards his next class. She presses him for more information but Lowell is like, you know none of that's real right? Nobody believes me, it was probably all in my head.

But Tansy is like, I believe you! I see ghosts and I believe you. And you're different now. You seem like a different person than... before it happened. You died and came back! You're so lucky, I'd love to be dead.

Lowell says sorry, Tansy, but you don't know what the fuck you're talking about. He can't help her. He walks away.  
And P.S. Nobody really believes that you see ghosts!

Tansy is left standing alone in the field. Titty.

INT. LOWELL'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A typical teenage boy's bedroom, dark and cluttered, though it might suggest that it's the room of a cooler jock than Lowell. The bedroom is still peppered with remnants of Lowell's former life, pre-death.

Lowell lifts his shirt to examine his torso in the mirror. He freezes. Lowell slowly traces his hand over the scar...

The scar is WHITE, completely devoid of color.

Lowell stares at his reflection.

INT. LOWELL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lowell sits around the dining room table with his mom and two little brothers as his father says Grace. After the family has completed their prayer, they un-join hands and dig in to dinner, though Lowell discretely swirls his mashed potatoes around with his fork. After a couple beats of family meal small talk, there's a KNOCK on the door. Lowell's mother gets up to answer the door, and returns to the dining room moments later.

There's a young lady here to see him.

EXT. LOWELL'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Tansy is waiting for Lowell on his front porch. Lowell takes her by the arm and pulls her down the front steps. He's like, let's take a walk!

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Tansy and Lowell walk down the sidewalk in the twilight. Lowell's like, okay. So assuming I believe you see ghosts, and I'm not saying that I do, why do you want to travel to the underworld so badly? You do understand that means you die like dead, right?

Tansy tells Lowell that she doesn't just... see ghosts. She dates them. And the love of her life is in big trouble! Tansy relays Johnny's message to Lowell.

\*\*I know I know, need to figure the message out.\*\*

Something Tansy says triggers a recognition in Lowell. He gives Tansy the rundown--

Lowell lost something in the underworld, an actual "piece" of himself that was taken, and he'll never be the same until he gets it back.

The concept of time in the underworld is elastic. So even though Lowell was only dead for forty minutes, it was like spending five years in the underworld.

The biggest hurdle to jump: if they want to journey to the underworld, they'll have to kill themselves. If they want to return from the underworld, they'll have to find a way to die for just a few minutes, and then come back to life. Once they're dead, they'll have a limited amount of time in the underworld, but Lowell's not exactly sure how much.

So... know of any ways they can stop their hearts for a chill amount of time?

Tansy thinks she might. She tells Lowell to meet her at her house on Friday night.

INT. SOUTHERN OCEAN COUNTY HOSPITAL - DAY

The following day, Tansy walks down a bustling hospital hallway. She is greeted by a friendly NURSE who asks if she's here to see her aunt. Tansy's like, yep! Just gonna grab something to eat from the cafeteria first. She keeps walking.

INT. HOSPITAL FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Tansy rounds a corner. She passes by a WANDERING GHOST. They acknowledge one another with a casual head nod.

INT. MEDICAL SUPPLY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tansy slips into an empty medical supply room. She pulls a little piece of paper from her pocket and hurriedly looks through the various labels. She finds what she's looking for, puts it in her knapsack, and books it out of there.

INT. TANSY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lowell arrives at Tansy's house on Friday night. She's home alone, because Aunt Isla has just left for work, the graveyard shift at the hospital. (Later, when Tansy is revived at the midpoint, Aunt Isla will have just returned home soon after leaving because she forgot something-- so Tansy and Lowell were only under for a couple minutes.)



Tansy's got the goods. After the requisite amount of internet research, Tansy feels confident that the medicine she pilfered will stop their hearts long enough to give them some quality time in the underworld but not so long that they'll, you know, stay dead dead.

INT. TANSY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tansy and Lowell prepare to cross the threshold. They climb onto Tansy's bed (on top of the sheets, of course), swallow the necessary pills, and wait for their hearts to stop.

Lowell tells Tansy that they have to hold hands to stay together when they die. (Is this actually true? Who knows!)

Tansy and Lowell join hands, and slowly lose consciousness.

## Benefits of Dating Ghost Boyfriend

Ghost boyfriend is a variation on dream boyfriend, which is, to say, a boyfriend in your dreams (which is not, necessarily, the boyfriend of your dreams). Dream boyfriend is good for when you don't particularly feel like alive is the best thing to be, but sleep is the closest you're willing to get to death. Dream boyfriend is not ideal, though, because you can only hang out while you're sleeping. Ghost boyfriend is very versatile. Asleep or awake, he's willing to go the distance. So what if people think you're single, and also a weirdo? You're wearing a pajama shirt as a regular shirt and that makes you sad?! So what if people think you're spending yet another day on this planet, just like you do every day, alone? Really so what. You know what's up. You've got ghost boyfriend.

Pros: Ghosts know the most about being in love.  
Ghost boyfriend is who he is when you meet him.  
He won't get a bad haircut, or adopt a bullshit attitude.  
No glum realization when he grows into someone you no longer recognize.  
Ghost boyfriend pours his spirit right into your heart,  
like lemonade in a frosted glass.  
Your body is a movie, and ghost boyfriend is the star.  
The day will never come when he no longer breathes.

Cons: Sometimes ghost boyfriend wants to talk about it, the moment of death,  
but it involves propellers, so I'm like, go easy on the details.  
The absence of human tongue on your vagina.  
Ghost boyfriend's white tee-shirt is made of a cotton you can't ever touch.  
You need to wear a helmet and ghost boyfriend doesn't.  
But actually ghost boyfriend doesn't remember how to ride a bike.  
Tying the knot means something different.  
I can't imagine having kids with him.

Shea Mayo

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